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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000995

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SUBJECT: CHARGE'S MEETING WITH DFM SASAE

REF: CANBERRA 414

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Classified By: CDA James P. Zumwalt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Charge met Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Kenichiro Sasae April 27 to discuss North Korea, Iran, China, and the recently concluded U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. Sasae stressed the importance of taking a balanced approach to North Korea. On Iran, he sought to assure Washington that Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone would deliver a tough message to Tehran during his May 2 visit. Sasae expressed leeringness about China's growing influence in the Pacific Island region. END SUMMARY

North Korea

12. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Kenichiro Sasae stressed the need for "informal dialogue" with North Korea without seeming "desperate" during his discussion with Charge Zumwalt on April 27. He said that Pyongyang's reaction to the UN Security Council statement following the April 5 North Korean missile launch over Japanese airspace was "not surprising," but actually seemed more "reserved" and "subdued" than its responses to international condemnation following missile tests in 1998 and 2006. North Korea, nevertheless, is signaling that it might withdraw from all of its commitments and probably wants the UNSC to retract its statements. He stressed the need for a "cooling off period" to think about a new approach and, offering his personal view, underscored the utility of Washington holding informal contacts with the DPRK. Concerned parties must achieve a delicate balance between engagement and sanctions to get North Korea to change its ways, Sasae concluded.

Iran

13. (C) The subject of Iran took up a significant portion of Sasae's recent talks with Under Secretary Burns on the margins of the US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Canberra on April 21 (Reftel). The discussion focused on 1) getting Tehran to take a constructive approach on nuclear issues, and 2) pushing Tehran to free detained U.S. freelance journalist Roxana Saberi, Sasae reported. Sasae said that MOFA contacted the Iranian Embassy in Japan to urge Iran to release Saberi before FM Nakasone's scheduled trip to Tehran May 2. He added that Nakasone looked forward to his call later that day with Secretary Clinton to discuss the matter. FM Nakasone sought to repeat Japan's offer to convey key messages on behalf of the United States and to assure the Secretary that Japan will do nothing to undermine the current international sanctions regime against Tehran, Sasae said. FM Nakasone is ready to deliver such points to Iranian FM Mottaki and to the highest levels of the Iranian Government, Sasae added. He also stressed the importance of concerned parties recognizing some of the positive, more "balanced" positions of the Iranian Government, such as its contributions to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

China

14. (C) Sasae characterized overall TSD discussions as

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productive, frank, and informal. Trilateral dialogue is meaningful particularly in areas such as defense, intelligence matters, and regional issues, he noted. Talks on China were particularly "interesting." All three dialogue partners noted potential problem areas with China. Sasae said that he sensed strong Australian interest in expanding its political role internationally, as evidenced by Canberra's engagement in issues related to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.

15. (C) Sasae mentioned that the United States, Japan, and Australia had a role to play in addressing growing Chinese presence in the Southeast Asia and Pacific Island regions. The recent political turmoil in Fiji left the country particularly vulnerable to Chinese influence. The Pacific Islands will become especially crucial if China continues on the path of military modernization, he added. Nevertheless, Japan does not intend to invite Fijian representatives to the upcoming Pacific Island Leaders Meeting (PALM 5) in Hokkaido, because of Fijian leader Bainimarama's coup and Fiji's subsequent estrangement from other democratic countries, Sasae reported (Reftel).

Indonesia

16. (C) Sasae saw Indonesia as a pillar of ASEAN and as the anchor of Japan's policy in Southeast Asia. Indonesia has made great strides in democracy building. The Bali Democracy Forum, in particular, has positively influenced such efforts, Sasae observed.

Japan-Russia Relations

17. (C) On Russia, Sasae mentioned that Prime Minister Taro Aso and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev held "good discussions" on the sidelines of the G-20 Economic Leaders Summit in London and that both sides look forward to Russian

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's visit to Japan in May. The agenda will likely include economic issues and the longstanding dispute over the Northern Territories. On the Territories, Sasae said that Japanese Special Envoy Shotaro Yachi admits to giving the wrong impression when he recently said that Japan would accept Russia's returning less than all of the disputed lands. He said that we should ignore this statement.

Bio Note

18. (C) Sasae's comments on North Korea are consistent with his well-known practical approach to foreign policy decisionmaking. His preference for a balanced strategy on the North stems from his experience serving in the North American Affairs Bureau, where he gained understanding of the regional security role of the U.S.-Japan alliance, and in the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau (formerly the Asian Affairs Bureau), where he learned the potential benefits of policy engagement.
ZUMWALT